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THE GLORY OF THE LORD

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Preachers of To-Day

THE

GLORY OF THE LORD

SIX SERMONS

BY THE

REV. ROBERT EYTON

CANON OF WESTMINSTER, RECTOR OF ST. MARGARET'S, AND SUB-ALMONER TO THE QUEEN

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THE GLORY OF THE LORD

I

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it."—ISAIAH xl. 5.

THERE have been two revelations of Christ. Of course, in one sense, we cannot separate them, any more than we can separate the tree from the fruit, or the light from the sun. But very often, if we are to think truly at all, we must think of them apart from one another. There is the revelation in the New Testament which we are thinking of now—first to shepherds, then to kings, then to apostles, and then to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear—the revelation of the Messiah so long expected, the revelation of the Son of God, Who could be

seen, spoken to, handled and talked with. The glory of the Lord was revealed in Him. "We have seen His glory"—it is the treasured remembrance of the beloved apostle. But all flesh did not then see His glory. It was revealed only to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear.

This revelation, stupendous, amazing as it was, was too near to men to be apprehended at the time in any but its broadest outlines. "Thou art the Christ," cries Peter; "My Lord and my God," cries Thomas. "Now we know that Thou knowest all things; by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God," cry they all. By such fragmentary statements faith strove to give itself expression, faith saw through a glass darkly; it saw—and then a moment, and it saw not, notably on the Crucifixion night; but yet it saw enough to form a vehicle for an informing and quickening Spirit. It saw enough to hand down the certainty of its own conviction for you and me to receive. That was one revelation.

The other revelation of Christ takes in the first, builds upon the first, never gets away from the first. "The Word was made flesh,

and dwelt among us" is its keystone. We may never forget that. But it is a revelation, if I may so speak, through gradual realisation. Slowly and painfully through long ages, and out of many mistakes and failures and disappointments, the revelation of Christ is emerging, is being evolved out of the misconceptions and the strivings of successive generations. Each age sees in that inexhaustible Character the answer to its own wants and needs, the key to its own aspirations; but no age sees it as it really is. Those who grasp this gradual and progressive realisation gaze unmoved upon the storms which seem to others to threaten the Church or to imperil the creed. They see how through apparent antagonisms, through, so to speak, the cataclysms of successive movements—the revival of learning, the Reformation, the rise of Rationalism, one after the other—not only how false likenesses of Christ, "false Christs" have been taken away, but how other phases of His Character have been brought out, which were unrealised in previous history. To them the chief interest of history is the gradual realisation of

Christ. Whatever men may think, this is the stone that cannot be overthrown: the glory of the Lord is being revealed in the realisation of Christ, and one day all flesh shall see it together.

As we look back we cannot help seeing how the expectations of each period have seen in Christ the incentive for their own immediate effort, the hope of their own success. It has been described for us in immortal language: "An age of intellectual confusion saw in the portraiture of the Gospels the ideal of the great Teacher and Prophet of human kind, the healer of human error. It judged rightly, but that was only part. The monastic spirit saw in it the warrant and the suggestion of a life of self-devoted poverty; who can doubt that there was much to justify it? Who can doubt that the reality was something far wider than the purest type of the monastic life? The Reformation saw in Him the great improver, the breaker of the bonds of servitude, the quickener of the dead letter of the Gospel, the stern rebuker of a religion which had forgotten His spirit. And doubtless He was all this. Only He was in-

finitely more. And now in modern times there is the disposition to dwell on Him as the ideal Exemplar of perfect manhood, great in truth, great in the power of goodness, great in His justice and forbearance, great in using and yet being above the world, great in infinite love, the opener of men's hearts to one another—He is all this, and it is infinitely precious; we may glorify Him for it, and exalt Him as much as we can; but even yet He will far exceed."[1] And the strange thing about all this is how every mistake which men have made about Christ's religion has, in some way or other, brought out Christ Himself more clearly. Every effort to tie Him down has only resulted in a reaction which has exhibited some other side of His Person and Work, and has brought out some stronger, wider, deeper view which has for a time swept men along with it, and left them a little further on than they have ever been before. The glory of the Lord is always being revealed by great reactions against false systems—reactions which do not merely destroy false conceptions,

[1] Church's sermon on "Christ's Example."

but which popularise, and make intelligible to the minds of men, true conceptions of Him.

Let us take two instances—though this is a deeply interesting line of thought which might be much more fully worked out—which afford the best method of illustrating this revelation of Christ, as it were, by reaction. For centuries it was supposed that the cause of Christ and the worship of Christ were identified with, and that the approval of Christ was bestowed upon, the doctrine of exclusive salvation. There is a sentence in the Athanasian Creed which exactly embodies what was the prevailing idea at that time—"He, therefore, that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity"—that is to say, if he wandered from the lines laid down by the preceding verses, there was no such thing as salvation possible for him. The doctrine of exclusive salvation was characteristic of Western Christianity. To believe rightly was held to be a necessary condition of salvation, and to believe rightly you "must believe what the Church tells you." This theory of exclusive salvation, we see now, obscured Christ's attitude, and mis-

represented His teaching. You have only to take up the Sermon on the Mount and try to read into it that doctrine, in order to see how different is the character and the spirit and the real teaching of Christ from that which for centuries posed as His representative.

Study the beatitudes, the new law, the parables, the discourses of Christ, and you cannot help feeling that you are in a different world of ideas altogether. Christ's invitations are as wide as the wants and woes of mankind. "Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall have rest unto your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Fancy these words becoming real to those who were groaning under the intellectual despotism of the Augustinian theology!

Again, Christ's teaching about the Father is the simplest thing in its directness. "The Father loveth you;" "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." It is impossible to think of anything that is less exclusive, or any-

thing that less lends itself to exclusiveness than, for instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son. There is no more sudden change, intellectually and morally speaking, possible than from the atmosphere of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew and the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke to the Bull of Innocent III., which threatened any prince with dethronement who refused to extirpate heretics, or the Bull of Innocent IV., which commanded men to treat heretics as robbers and murderers—that is to say, to kill them as quickly as they could. Both these Bulls, inspiring as they did the mediæval practice of religious persecution, were logically the direct results of the doctrine of exclusive salvation. If men can only be saved by their intellectually accepting certain propositions about God, then I grant it may be kindness to compel them to accept those propositions; just as you restrain lunatics by shutting them up in madhouses, or prevent the fever-stricken from spreading infection. Granted the proposition that Divine truth can be so expressed in words that it cannot be diversely conceived of, or

otherwise conceived of, without offence to God, and then religious persecution seems to me to follow as naturally as possible.

And so for centuries the Church was a teaching body—it certainly was that—but it was, besides, a persecuting body. It began by persecuting paganism, and there are few more doleful phases of history than those which tell us how soon the Christians in their day of triumph, after the accession of Constantine, forgot every vestige of feeling about that toleration which a century before their predecessors had so earnestly longed for and preached! On Augustine, most of all—great as his services in some departments of religious thought have been—rests the stigma that he was the framer of a theology of intolerance, and the apologist on religious grounds of the most cruel forms of persecution. "Heresy," he says, "is a kind of adultery, the worst species of murder, a form of blasphemy;" and if the New Testament contains no examples of the apostles applying force to extirpate heresy, St. Augustine is ready with a reason even for that. It was not because the apostles would not; it

was because they could not, for the reason that in their day no prince had embraced Christianity!

After the lull of a few centuries religious persecution broke out once more in the twelfth century—again as the direct consequence of the doctrine of exclusive salvation—and for centuries Europe simply flowed with blood, blood that was shed under the direction of ecclesiastical authorities, and under the pressure of public opinion which was mainly directed by the clergy. The Spanish Inquisition burned thirty-one thousand people; in the Netherlands Charles V. put to death for their religion fifty thousand people, and from the mission of Dominic, the area of persecution embraced almost all Christendom, and its triumph was so complete as even to destroy every memorial of the contest. I know there is a theory very popular in modern times, that if men persecute any cause enough they will be sure to promote reactions. And that is true enough when they only use mild measures, but when persecution means extirpation it is not true. The extirpation of the Waldensians

is a case in point. And it should be remembered that the persecuted of those days died, not by a painless death, but by a death which was deliberately selected in order to inflict the greatest possible torture. They were tortured first, and then they were burned alive by a slow fire. The physical suffering that lies at the door of the Roman Church is simply terrible, but the physical suffering is dwarfed when you try to remember the depths of the mental suffering which this doctrine of exclusive salvation brought with it. The man in the first flush of youth died a cruel death, but that was not the worst. He died knowing that all who were nearest and dearest to him in the world believed that his end on earth was the earnest of eternal agonies of the same kind in the world beyond.

Now, think of all that—and I have described it to you at some length because I want to get the thing clearly into your minds—think of all that as the result of Christmas Day, and of its message of "Peace and Goodwill"! Surely, you say, there was a time when religious men of

themselves came to see how irreconcilable this Gospel persecution was, when by the open Bible the glory of the Lord was revealed and the Christ of the New Testament came back. That is a common delusion. As a matter of fact, the Reformation only turned the tide of persecution in another direction. Protestantism, in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. and Elizabeth, never arrived at the logical result of its own principles of liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment. Its adherents persecuted Romanists in exactly the same way as these had persecuted the early Reformers. Again, Calvin burned Servetus for his alleged Sabellianism. It was not till the age of Chillingworth that any idea of toleration took possession of Protestants, and even then no pope was ever more intolerant than that Archbishop Laud, whom some quaint survivals of a past age are now attempting to glorify by a special festival.

Religious liberty actually came—and we must own it—through forces which were distinctly outside those of declared religion. Religious liberty,

doubtless, is ultimately due to the conception of Christ as the emancipator of the reason, but it came not, in the first instance, through Protestantism, but through a great sceptical movement which originated in France towards the close of the sixteenth century, and which had for its chief supporters men who certainly cannot be counted as religious apologists. Its results were the Edict of Nantes, and ultimately the French Revolution. That religious liberty should have come through such means is one of the most wonderful things in the history of the world. It is a thing to be dwelt upon in order to save us from shallowness. If once we get it into our minds it helps us to understand how true it is that "God's ways are not as our ways." We should have expected that there would have been a great revulsion of religious feeling from those inhuman practices; we should have expected that some great rising tide of Christian feeling would have swept away the blot of persecution; yet we find that, though religious feeling unquestionably played its part, "the rough places were made plain and the

crooked places were made straight" primarily by the action of a strong sceptical movement, by the general adoption of the principles of Bacon and Descartes, and by the evolution of those principles through writers among our own countrymen like Jeremy Taylor.

Hence it comes to pass that in modern Christendom all that is best is strongly ranged against the tendency to insist upon the necessity of merely correct opinions, or of dwelling exclusively on the dogmatic side of the faith. All that is best in modern Christendom, all that is most precious in modern theology, exalts as the chief intellectual virtue, not a submissive but a truth-seeking spirit. The tendency now is not to enlarge on intellectual propositions which must be received, but on the moral side of faith and its results in life. Here notably Christ was revealed by great reaction; He was revealed as the Emancipator of the reason, as the Champion of the truth-seeking spirit, as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Christ was revealed by a great reaction which ran, as I have said, through what, at first sight, men would call an

irreligious channel—a sceptical movement. Men made every mistake about Him which they could possibly make before He could be understood, but at last the glory of the Lord was revealed in the emancipation of the reason, in the triumph of religious liberty.

On much the same general lines a fuller revelation of Christ seems to be proceeding around us. The glory of the Lord is being revealed by a recognition, in a way and to an extent far beyond that grasped by any former age of the brotherhood of mankind—a recognition that as God is our Father, so man is our brother. And, as we were told very recently in this place, it is through the application of these principles in the way that seems best and wisest to each man, that this modern movement will go on and will find its end. As God is our Father, so man is our brother. That has never been realised before to the extent to which it is now. Man is our brother; not one for us to persecute, or to drill into our own methods of thought, or to force even into what we hold to be the right reading

of Divine revelation. He is not to be provided with a suitable habitation after death, and to be left to starve and rot and die here. No! man is our brother, whom we have by all means to teach, to guide, to help, but always in the brotherly spirit. And there is all the difference between teaching and guiding and helping in the mediæval fashion, with the stake at the end of it, and doing these things in a brotherly spirit. Man is our brother, in whose *present* habitation, in whose way of life here below—in whom, whether absent from, or present in church, we, as Christians, are bound to be interested.

I believe that far the most intellectually alive of all modern socialistic forms of thought is Christian socialism. In every church, in every body of Christians, it is drawing the enthusiasm, the heart, and, to some extent, the intellect of our day. In it the glory of the Lord is being revealed. But here, again, I want to point out to you that the same rule holds good. It seems that Christ is again being revealed as the Brother of mankind by the working of a great reaction.

Christian socialism comes to us in the form of a reaction from that selfish and excessive individualism which an emotional religiosity has put before us as the only means of individual salvation. The genesis of Christian socialism will be found to have come through a double reaction against the selfish individualism of so-called evangelicalism, and against the inhuman indifference of quasi-Christians to the present welfare of their brethren. We have learned that Christ lives. We have not to go back to the charnel-house of the past to find and to get back to the living Christ. We have found, too, that there is no salvation in Him except for those who will lose their souls in order to save them, who will fling themselves into some form of active work and enterprise for others.

No doubt the old individualism dies very hard. It is still contented to let others perish if it can have its prayer-meetings on the one hand, or its dogmas and ritual on the other hand, for itself. It can still look forward with a shake of the head to the prospect of seeing those who disagree with its formulas receive

their due reward. It can still wrap itself up in its virtue, like the pagan of old, and see its brethren go to perdition. But the forces of our day are against it, the heart of our day is against it, the laws of reaction in our day are against it. Above all, the story of Christmas is against it; the story of Christmas is its solvent. For that story tells not merely of a man, but of *the* Man Who is in every man; and that story of the Christ Who is incarnate in the race will be its final destruction. We shall live, some of us, I trust, to see more and more of the glory of the Lord revealed in Christian brotherhood, in a revived interest in man's whole welfare —the welfare of his spirit, the welfare of his mind, the welfare of his body, the welfare of his whole estate. We shall see, I trust, this Christian brotherhood too strong for the savage inhuman competition which now beats down to the ground thousands of our weaker brethren in Christ.

There is at present a great reaction from the old religious selfishness. That seems to be God's way. It seems more and more to be the

case that, as the world goes on, men must go up every wrong road, and exhaust all possibility of mistake, before they can find the right road. And surely, in our Christmas festival, we may help forward that blessed consummation, when we shall see the Christ in every man; when every want and every failing and every error in others, which perhaps now often makes us angry, will seem to be only an appeal from them to us, to give them that which may cure their wants and their failings and their errors—the touch of human sympathy; when the highest rank open to men will again be seen to be—and there have been glimpses of it in the Church before—not riches or high place, but opportunity of service; when wars shall cease; when in deed and in truth the kingdom shall come, through the recognition of the universal brotherhood of man and all that it involves; when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

II

THE NEW BIRTH

"Jesus saith unto him, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—ST. JOHN iii. 3.

THE one thing that strikes us about Christ's conversation with Nicodemus is its representative character. The situation is always recurring wherever the call to higher truth comes face to face with mere traditional teaching or hereditary precept. Nicodemus is always with us in one shape or another. He is the embodiment of religious conventionalism and social respectability. He is always ready with his rationalistic efforts at solving spiritual mysteries; he is always trying to reduce the mysterious to the commonplace. He has his dwelling among current traditions and rules and interpretations, and he will not look beyond them. How can a man be born again except by recurrence to some

improbable natural method? And Christ's answer is always the same: "You must be born again,"—not in the lower world, but into a higher world; you must be born again, the Spirit must touch your spirit, and you must leave rule and tradition and interpretations behind you. Morally you must be born again into the kingdom of the Father, where God is loved and trusted and dealt with at first hand and communed with.

The very limited application of these words to the Sacrament of Baptism is familiar enough to us—so familiar, that I only notice it to avoid the possibility of being supposed to ignore it. At baptism the potential seed is cast into us by God. What becomes of it very often it would be extremely difficult to say from the outside point of view. It seems to elude the very closest observation. The lofty and inspiring faith of the Baptismal Service is one of our most cherished treasures. It lays open to us the possibilities that lie before that tiny life that is declared to be touched and filled by the Divine power, but in a very true and

real sense the potential seed cast into that life there by God may be so buried and forgotten that its every trace may seem to have departed. "Ye must be born again" is still Christ's message to the baptized—born continually into a higher kind of life. There is no finality, there is nothing but a perpetual progress—born again in every fresh opportunity, born again through every call to higher work, born again through every great and overwhelming sorrow, born again through every spiritual trial—through the doubt that sifts the real from the mere traditional within you, through the agony of remorse—always born again as you go from the outside to the more central region of the kingdom. You never outgrow the necessity. The grey-haired man needs to be born again. It is not merely true when you become a Christian. The new birth to some deeper, holier, higher region of life, involving a fuller realisation of the kingdom, is always with you. When a man becomes convinced that the love of God is behind the system which he has always worshipped as though it were God; when a

man comes to know the Father, he is born again.

And, if upon the ears of some of you the appeal sounds dreary and flat because it is associated with the platitudes or the irreverences of some so-called Gospel preacher who urges on you a semi-hysterical paroxysm, which he calls conversion, or acceptance of salvation; or who has worried you with invitations to what he calls faith, and to what your critical faculty enabled you to see was only self-confidence—if the appeal "You must be born again" sounds to some young man here like the echo of a nightmare, do not therefore put it from you or refuse to look at its possibilities. Surely your own experience has told you how, through some deep joy, how, through some deep revelation of a great love, you have been born again in a real sense here in your daily life, old things have passed away, behold! all things have become new. Believe that it is so when truth dawns upon you, or when some earnest resolution is taken. For there are many mansions in the Father's house, and he who lives in the

outer court—to follow out the parable—needs a new birth before he can dwell in joy and peace in the inner chamber. The dweller in the outer court of mere hereditary religious practice and conviction must be born again when he enters into the chamber of personal conviction. It is a new life with new possibilities. The mere zealot for Church Establishment must be born again to a deepened view of the possibilities of the kingdom of God. The mere dweller in the outhouse of religious sentiment must be born again before he can find himself in the business room of active social work, and the service of man. To dwell in the warmth and enjoy the peace and comfort of the Father's house in some outside kitchen is no doubt our first impulse. We want a religious experience for ourselves, and as we realise it, it drives us straight on to some deeper interest, to some more extended sympathy. The call is always from the lower to the higher. There is no resting-place. "You must be born again" is at once the message of the Christ in the cradle and the message of the New Year to-day

in our ears. Otherwise we shall sleep on and only awake to the consequences of being ghastly failures.

My brethren, I know that this goes against the natural feeling of many people to whom an easy hour of service on Sunday is a satisfaction of their religious emotions. We cling, naturally, always to what we like, to where we feel safe. We refuse to answer the calls that summon us higher. We hear them, but we sit still and sleep. We do not want to be born again. We love our present achievement, with its self-satisfactions and its easy tasks. We are deaf to the social sores around us. We pride ourselves on our well-ordered household, and the cry of miserable people never comes to our ears. We have settled down to a certain level of religious practice—the Parish Church in the morning and the Abbey in the afternoon—and it is at any rate, we say, not the lowest; and we decline to go deeper into anything. We fear lest we should get out of our depth, and the voice that tells us "You must be born again" seems only to savour of unpractical

idealism. But really for us, who believe in the larger life growing out of this, yet not disconnected with this, such a position is impossible. Nothing—and this is the truth that underlies the dream of theosophy—nothing but a perpetual re-birth can bring us to that higher life. Self-dissatisfaction is with most of us our one necessity. Do you remember Browning's verses on the pictures in Florence, that tremendous and thrilling contrast which he draws between the great Christian pictures in their manifest incompleteness and the early Greek statues with their manifest completeness of beauty and grace. Many of us have felt the contrast. It would be well for us all if we fought our way with him through the depression to which the thought sometimes gives birth. How vividly he sets forth the truth that I am trying to press upon you, that a sense of incompleteness is the first condition of completeness! You must ever be born again to higher completeness if you would believe in a life to come, and the very fact that you recognise your imperfection is the best thing

about you. It is finiteness in view and purpose that is our besetting sin. It was finiteness of view and purpose that gave to the old classic statues a chance to seem complete, and their very finiteness is the proof of their utter incompleteness; out of that came at once their possibilities and their impossibilities.

"Growth came when, looking your last on them all
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start—what if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they?
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature;
For time, theirs—ours, for eternity.

To-day's brief passion limits their range;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect—how else? they shall never change:
We are faulty—why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished;
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.
'Tis a lifelong toil till our lump be leaven.
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven."

And so on up to the final reply of Christian

art conscious of imperfection to the boast of Greek art—

"'And what more wish you?'
'To become now self-acquainters,
Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters:
To bring the invisible full into play!
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?'"

It is another echo of the old refrain of the everlasting necessity, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And all your deepest views of life will force upon you this same necessity. Through pain, through love, through failure, through change that dismays, through doubt that racks, you must be born again; the Divine fire must kindle the wood taken to the altar of sacrifice. "Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God."

Brethren, we cling to the known, the familiar, the tested; we think to find our Elysian fields there, and God will not let us. Just when we seem to have attained a measure of completeness, in comes the message as the very inmost necessity, "You must be born again." You

must be dissatisfied, you must yearn for what is better, you cannot rest, you must not be allowed to rest in your old cobweb view of religion. The Bible did not come straight down from heaven, ready translated into English, to meet every difficulty and save you the trouble of thinking. Even the Church's utterances are coloured by all sorts of human inventions; it is only through these that the Spirit voice slowly emerges. There is no finally satisfactory religious system, Roman, Anglican, Nonconformist, which will save you the trouble of thinking at all and give you your religion ready made. Even when you have got your formulary by heart, even if it expresses Divine truth, you must be born again before you will ever arrive at the heart of your formulary, at the heart of its many meanings. And when you have mastered the first it only opens the way to the second.

"How unsatisfactory!" groans the religious formalist. "Just when I thought I had got everything settled, you tell me I am to be unsettled again as the condition of perfection." Yes, there is no comfort for you, for the most

perplexing of all facts is this, that whatever is born again only knows more clearly than ever that it is imperfect. There is a tremendous temptation, therefore, to so many men—and I mean men who think and wish to do right; I am speaking to them—to linger in the lower regions of religious thought, to accept religious phrases without ever taking the lid off them as it were, and trying to see what is inside them because they dimly see the dangers that there possibly may be in taking the lid off. In accepting religious practices without considering their aim and purpose they are only yielding to the gravest spiritual temptation. We must go deeper, and the deeper we go the worst of it is —or, rather, the best of it, if we look at it from the true point of view—the deeper we go the more conscious we become of the half lights, the more conscious we become of our surrounding and our limitations. The lowest self-satisfaction, the worst feeling that we can have is that we have got to the end of things. There is always a certain satisfaction in the stereotyped and the fixed. But satisfaction never comes back again

when you get out of the region of the stereotyped and fixed. We could not go back to it; it would not be the same if we did; it never is the same. There is this bewildering fact that work, which seems perfect in some lower region, only gets into a higher region to manifest its own utter incompleteness. The formalist in religion hears the voice, "You must be born again," and he summons up courage one day and looks things in the face and tries to give the love of his mind to God, and to study the real wants of his fellow-creatures, and, poor fellow! he sees nothing more clearly; everything that was clear gets into mist, things have lost their distinctness of outline, and, though there is a sense that cannot leave him that somehow or other he is better off in this indistinctness of outline than he was in the old days of his fancied security; though he does see that there are truths and hopes and depths in religion that he never dreamed of before; though he sees that the struggle to know God is the highest struggle upon which man can enter, yet his first sense is that the loftier world into which he is

dimly conscious that he has entered, only reveals to him more strikingly than ever his own imperfections. In ordinary life—to go to that for a moment—we see the full power of the temptation—for such it is—to acquiesce in the lower levels of peace and comfort. I grant that in the religious life we do not see it always so clearly, because so much of the craving and the perturbations of the soul can only be known to God, and it is only here and there accidentally that a man of insight can trace them in others. But in ordinary life you see how blind men are to the necessity of their own re-birth when everybody around them is unconsciously saying to them, "Oh! do be born again." Look at this man with his little range of occupations which he fulfils, as he thinks, with very reasonable credit to himself. He is a good father, he is a good man of business, a well-mannered gentleman; he has his little scheme of duty; and the world around him is always calling out that there are social woes, religious wants which he might lend a hand to supply, or moral blots he might do something to cure. And he does

nothing, he refuses to hear. He acquiesces in the lower level; he fills his place, as he says; he carefully adorns his own person, he applies all round his petty rules of etiquette; and you feel about him that, if ever he is to be one scrap of use, he must begin with an intense personal dissatisfaction with himself, that the only thing that can ever save him will be something that will shake him out of his smug imperturbability, that he must "be born again." But when you begin to try to make him feel it, you see at once that, so far from his feeling uncomfortable about himself, his only feeling is that what he has got to do is to depreciate those who are trying to do these works which he will not touch with one of his little fingers. He sits in his cool and snug retreat, and he surveys the toilers who are trying to set things right in the world around them, and he elaborately criticises them. It never seems to enter into his head that he is a coward and a shirker, and that, at any rate, they are workers; that he is like the man who sits on the shore finding fault with the methods of one of the crew of the lifeboat who goes at the risk of

his life to try to rescue a drowning brother. As you listen to his suave criticisms of men whose boots he is not worthy to black, the Christ's words come to you with a new force of application: "You, you polite, you well-intentioned, you well-informed gentleman, you must be born again; except you be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God."

There must be people here to-day who are like that all through, like it in their social life, like it in their moral life, like it in their religious life—satisfied with some lower plane of life, satisfied so long as they keep out of gross sins, satisfied so long as they do not knowingly break the Commandments, but born of the flesh, always betraying their origin, never touched with the Spirit, never kindled with fire from on high.

Ah! my brethren, it is all negative. You must be dissatisfied with yourself first if you are to escape the doom of uselessness. You are blind, you are deaf to the wants all around you. You must go and work, you must plunge into the sea of human life; you must find some mission among the poor that needs helpers, and you must

not say "I will do this or that," but "set me to work at anything you can or that I can do." You must disturb your commonplace views of what you ought to give by giving yourself. You must be born again. Go home, read Christ's words, pray to Christ at the beginning of this new year till His informing Spirit seizes you, enwraps you, inflames you, till the force He came to send upon the earth seizes upon you and makes you feel your wretched incompleteness, even while it shows you a vision of what you might be. You self-satisfied Nicodemus—you with your Pharisaic traditions, you with your moral negations, you with your respectable Sunday afternoon worship, you must be born again, or else neither now nor ever will you see the kingdom of God.

III

THE INFLUENCE OF ABSENCE[1]

"It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."—ST. JOHN xvi. 7.

WITH troubled hearts, and anxious faces, the Eleven sit round their Lord. Question after question rises in their hearts concerning their strange mission; some few get themselves formulated in words, but a thousand other heart cravings will not shape themselves in words at all; they cannot ask all they want. He will tell them all things (they think) some day when the need arises; they can go to Him at any time and ask: and lo! suddenly this consolation is swept away from them. He, their Lord, their Master, for Whose sake they had parted not only with the ties of natural affection, but with the popular reading of the religious

[1] This Sermon having been previously published, is inserted by permission of Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co., London.

inheritance of their forefathers—He, their one and only Guide, is going to leave them. Nor is that all; it is better for them (He says) that He should go, for some one else is to take His place—the unseen Paraclete, the Spirit of God, Who can only come when He goes. The conditions of "knowing Christ after the flesh," the element of sense which is inseparable from contact, are incompatible with a knowledge of, and a fellowship with, the unseen Guide Who was to take His place. "If"—and only if—"I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Two thoughts come out of this expediency and this necessity, both hard to realise, and harder still to preserve when realised. We are always, in some way or other, rebelling against them. Every time we say good-bye to any one we love there rises something of rebellion within us against the one; while every time we assent to a formula which we have never thought out, we ignore the other. The two thoughts are distinct, yet always, somehow, demanding each other. The one is that absence is more powerful, under certain conditions, than presence; that it

is again and again expedient for us that those who influence us by love, by example, or by precept, should go away: the other is that truth only becomes truth to us when it is realised in the spiritual region; that the truest thoughts require certain spiritual media before we can possess them, or they can hold us.

Let us think of these two things this morning. They carry us into collision with nearly all our modern idolatries; they are fruitful and inspiring in proportion as we take them in; to the formalist and the legalist, and the thoughtless, they have no meaning.

1. Absence is better than presence under certain conditions; the influence of the absent is not only sometimes stronger in its degree, it is always purer in its kind than the influence exerted by presence. Sometimes, dimly, we have been conscious of the truth enshrined in these words. We have recognised the fact that the influence of absence leaves its spirit; and the more we think why we are here, the more we understand it. We are made to be tried, proved, tested, and the conditions of our trial are, or

seem to be, whether we will do what is right when we are left to ourselves. It is very likely that we shall not do right; it might very easily seem that if some one stood over us continually with a metaphorical birch-rod, we should apparently do better than we do now—it often does seem so to some of us. We should not be so self-willed, or so idle, or so vain, or so extravagant, as, perhaps, alas! we often are. And yet we should not be better, because we should only be acting in the teeth of our desires, through fear of the consequences, through dread of the descent of the birch-rod. It is better for us to be left, at any rate sometimes, without any commanding influence to learn to do without it —better, even if we seem to do worse things, because it is always better to know the worst about yourself; there is more hope when you know, and are not in the terrible bond of self-deceit. If we are to be better, instead of only acting as though it were better to keep up appearances, then it is expedient for us that our best influences should sometimes, and, perhaps even altogether, leave us. We shall stumble

and fall, as the Apostles did when the Lord left them, but the inward guidance will win us back at our day of Pentecost, and the stumbling and falling will clear away false growths that might have left us without a foundation to the end.

In certain ways we get glimpses of this truth in our own lives. We get to discount mere sense-impressions very easily when we begin to think. We become conscious that it is not worth that always influences powerfully; there is a quasi-hypnotism that belongs to some natures, there is a kind of magnetic influence for good or evil which is often not found in either the best or the worst of men. What does influence us positively and powerfully is more often the remembrance of words spoken, than the words themselves at the time; true it is they do not make us weep, or even tingle, as they did when we heard them, but they have, somehow, a stronger power than merely to produce emotion—they move the will. The influence of great personalities certainly is not affected by either absence or death on those who know them, so far as it is an influence on character, and not merely on fears, or on the

spirits. We are better when we think, even in their absence, of great, high-minded men. Napoleon is said to have acknowledged that Christ's influence was greater than his own, because Christ could influence men in absence, while he, himself, found that he could only influence them when actually present; but what he owned to be true of Christ is true, in a less degree, of every one who has walked in His footsteps, or loved goodness. It is only the quasi-hypnotic influence exerted by natures like Napoleon's which absence removes, and such an influence has little or no effect on character. You and I, when we come to what has really and lastingly influenced us for good, if we are capable of making the investigation, will find ourselves going back to a very few things, and some of them of very slight apparent significance; but the more deeply we interrogate our consciousness, the more we shall find that those things that influenced us have found their real power, and left their mark just in proportion as the mere sense-impressions, which were their temporary vehicle, have become weakened; that,

in very deed and truth, it was expedient for us that those who have helped us most have gone away.

The influence of a dead parent, whom we have really reverenced as well as loved, is a case in point; the more deeply we analyse the results of their lives upon us, the more convinced we become that the permanent elements in those treasured memories have attained to their full power only since they have become memories. And if all this seems strange and hard to us, it is well to think about it. It is so dangerous for us to think that if we rise to the expectations of those about us we need aim at nothing else; that is to say, we need have no ideal standard at all, but only a floating one. There is plenty of room for self-deceit of the worst kind about that attitude; and yet this sense of rising to what other people expect of us haunts us as a kind of misty standard of achievement. It is difficult to think that when we have done all that others demand, when we are said to be irreproachable parents, or honest men of business, or fond mothers, we may still

be the most unprofitable servants; that we have only plunged deeper into self-deceit; that it were better for us to have no feeling of satisfaction than to have a false one; far better to face truth and to die with an aching feeling of unrest, than to live soothed by a false comfort.

Character is in truth deeper than action; the good tree can only bring forth permanently the good fruit, and character must escape from sense-influence if it is to deepen into maturity. Granted that it may not deepen, that it may seem to go down into the pit—yet the risk must be faced sooner or later. Do not think to make things better by refusing the risk. Gold must be tried by fire, and declared badness is often a more hopeful state through the repulsions it creates, than the attitude of letting "I dare not wait upon I would." Sense-influence has its place; it will do much for us in early life—it must do much; but the greatest thing it does is not to prevent our falling into the fire, or even running into serious mischiefs, but in leaving the impression behind it of a personality which,

while it won our love, claimed our reverence. And in the deepest things of all at the present, we are moved by the thought of people who have influenced us more than by those people themselves when present—moved more healthfully, more really, less emotionally perhaps, but more really. We may not shed tears, or break into excitable pæans of admiration, but we *act* differently, and we become different, and in that lies the justification of the expediency of their absence. So it was with the Apostles. What was it that transformed the timid questioners of the last discourses, or the panic-stricken band at the crisis of the Lord's fate, into the calm and deliberate body which accepts its responsibilities so cheerfully, and fills up the vacancy in the Apostolic college with a dignity which it would be difficult to exaggerate? Surely it was the influence of absence. By degrees, in the days of the Resurrection, they were trained to do without that powerful, overshadowing influence under which, for three and a half years, they had lived, and lo! the transformation is wrought. What they never could

have become had He stayed with them, they became when He left them—a calm, dignified and collected body, which feels its responsibilities, and sets its hand to the work nearest it, and is ready for the day of Pentecost. In the first chapter of the Acts, even before the day of Pentecost, we read the justification in the conduct of the Apostles of our Master's words, "It is expedient for you that I go away." The influence of that, as of any other great personality, is not really shown in overshadowing, or in forcing, or in compelling; not in quasi-magnetism which binds them by sense-influence, but in the aftergrowth of the essential elements of its life and spirit, in the reading and translating into laws of character and action the principles of His life, and the ruling features which distinguished it.

If then, as we go through life, we have to part with much that we gratefully own has been to us an inspiration and a joy, if we find ourselves cut adrift from a sheltering home, or a protecting love, or a beautiful example, or a strong influence, let us not forget that

there are compensations. It is expedient for us that they go away; for if they go not away, too often we think that a literal copying of themselves is the only lesson which their lives have to teach us; if they go not away, their spirit cannot come to us. All the most precious and fruitful influence in the world is the influence of that spirit which survives a close association of any kind, and remains as its choicest fruit. There are things in the best influences that are marred by presence; there are obstacles and limitations which contact preserves; every one of us who looks back on a great friendship which death has closed, knows how absence purified it; it enabled us to see things more truly about our friend; enabled us to escape from the often bewildering tyranny of sense-impressions; enabled us to see how for us, too, it was expedient that he should go away; for if he did not depart, his spirit —his inmost essential influence—could not come to us. It is not always easy to see this; there are moments in which it is impossible; but the moments, when so true a vision is vouch-

safed, are among the most precious and serious of our lives. So that in our own consciousness and experience the departure of the visible friend, and the coming of the invisible spirit, is justified.

2. I turn to the other thought—that truth only becomes truth to us when it is realised in the spiritual region. The Apostles thought they knew Who Christ was; St. Peter answered correctly, "Thou art the Christ," but they uttered a truth which was not realised in the spiritual region; it was as we see again and again by the questions they ask Him—it was as though He were the Son of God, and as though He were not. Whatever issues and consequences attached to His being what He was could not be seen while He was with them; His Spirit must come into them to teach them those consequences and issues, and His Spirit could not come while His Bodily Presence was with them: the two were incompatible; but when His Spirit should come, He would "guide them into all truth." "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." It would not

be too much to say that in the realisation of this lies the hope of Christendom. Literalism has done its deadly work; it has formulated its syllogisms, and men have thought mere verbal adhesion to them all that was necessary. Romanism has formulated in one way, Protestantism in another, Anglicanism in another; and the failure of each and all is apparent somewhere. How are we to hope to see the dawn of better things? We answer confidently, and with the highest hope, not by imagining reforms, and working out the details of reconstruction, but by entering into those words, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," by each endeavouring to arrive at a truer meaning of the spirit and principles of Christ's life, by catching the secret of His life—self-sacrifice for great and worthy ends. If every Christian set himself to strive after this, Christ's Kingdom would come to-morrow. It will never come by mere adherence to doctrines, by being what men call sound in faith, *i.e.* always ready to utter our partial crudities with consummate assurance. We shall bring it nearer by trying to live on

what we believe, by letting it grow into us, and ourselves growing into it; by accepting the standard, the unalterable standard, of the Christian ideal, and by trying to reform our convictions on all subjects in accordance with it. To hold the truth in unrighteousness is an evil not obscurely written in the history of Christian effort, and it has always been considered by too many in every portion of Christendom that the holding the truth was a much greater matter than the unrighteousness. This is the πρωτὸν ψεῦδος with which everything that is earnest and not conventional or opportunist has to contend in every age. That protest may seem ineffectual, but wherever it is sincere, it is the one real contribution to the setting up of the Kingdom. And here we need entertain no illusions. The Spirit of Christ has made things clear to us in no obscure fashion. We may have doubts about the confusions that divide the Church, but we have no doubt about the fact that the Christian spirit is the spirit that sacrifices self for great ends, and that seeks not its own. The laws of character and choice,

as set forward in the Sermon of the Mount, remain imperishable and immutable; and when once the vision of their meaning has dawned upon us, we can do nothing less than in some active and real fashion endeavour to translate their meaning for us into actual effort. In that effort lies the hope of united Christendom. We cannot escape the conviction that in these days Christ has taught these deepest lessons to some who do not care to seem to follow Him. It comes home to us visibly in the highest and best literature of our day. There are many who have His spirit who do not call Him Master. And those of us who dare to hope for a greater future for Christianity than the world has ever yet seen, may well rejoice in any trace of His spirit to be found in current literature and thought; that still in another sense it remains true, that if He departs from their vision He yet sends His Spirit to them. It is another proof of His world-wide mission, of His fellowship with the whole race, and it may be that thus He is teaching us those deep lessons of mutual forbearance, and as St. Paul

calls it, "rejoicing in others," which Christendom has not yet learnt.

This is our hope, and here lies our duty. For whatever be the issue of the religious confusions of our time, the only lasting contribution which we can make to their solution is to endeavour to enter into hidden wisdom, the inner teaching of the Spirit of Christ, so that truth may become truth to ourselves; so that we may not merely assent to the truth, or formulate the truth, but that we may know the truth—that truth which alone can "make us free."

IV

CHRISTIAN UNITY

"The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."—ACTS iv. 32.

THIS was the immediate effect of the first outpouring of the Spirit—oneness of heart and soul—the same desire, the same enthusiasm, the same great end. One spirit so dominated them as to obscure all sense of possession. They overstepped, or rather they ignored, all limitations of property because the inward oneness was so intensely realised: everything, gifts, talents, possessions, must all come in. They knew the gladness of that thrill of enthusiasm which, under the propelling power of a new conviction, makes men say "Let us live for one another, and with one another." The writer of the Acts recurs more than once with an evidently strong fascination to the ideal "they had all

things common." This voluntary relinquishment of property laid hold of his imagination; he saw in it the evidence of an inward oneness, only realised then for a time, soon to fade away, but to be dwelt on and remembered; because it had been once, there was the power to reproduce it.

The particular manifestation of this oneness —the having "all things common"—was temporary, it soon passed away, it was unworkable no doubt; but the duty of sharing is never lost sight of. St. Paul's ideal is that the inequalities of natural distribution are to be compensated for by voluntary sharing. Valleys are to be exalted and the mountains made low, so that there may be "a highway for our God." Those that are rich in this world are charged to be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." "He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." We all recognise the beauty of the ideal; let us see how we may work towards it.

A modern writer has forcibly reminded us that we cannot get golden conduct out of leaden instincts. He only re-echoes our Master's warning,

that the tree must be good before the fruit can be good. The Spirit of Christ must possess you in its striving after righteousness, in its tender sympathy, before you can arrive at the outward manifestation, at any true sharing of what you have. The impulse to share may be quickened from without by secondary motives, but its only lasting impulse is from within; only an inward moving of the Spirit will lead men to the recognition that nothing is to be counted their own. There are always possibilities of enkindling a common spirit, a common enthusiasm for these things, as long as the Spirit of Christ works among men, and in that direction lies all hope of any true reunion among Christians. In the intellectual direction, where men often vainly seek for signs of union, such signs will generally betoken a period of decadence. When men do not care enough to take the trouble to think, they will generally agree for the sake of quiet, and in order to get on to what they do care about. A period of intellectual union in Church history means a period of mental paralysis, when absolutism reigns supreme. If

you try to take a deep view, you will see that this must be so; for if Divine truth as revealed in the New Testament by Christ is compelled to fall back on paradox as a means of communicating its many-sidedness to mankind, we may be quite sure that it can never find a real entrance through the method of syllogism.

If the central truths of God's Revelation—the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the Life to come—are clearly revealed in the outlines, yet in the inferences from them, or in the detailed application of them, there may be even apparent contradiction of statement. As it is only through the pangs of a re-birth that intellectually many a soul comes to see the Kingdom of God, so there is pain and struggle in the emergence of all higher truth. And therefore to look for uniformity of statement or mechanical method, and to hope for reunion in that direction, is hopeless. Once reject the theory of spiritual absolutism, and intellectual union becomes impossible, except on the hypothesis of intense indifference. When men grow too indifferent to insist on any side

of the truth, when men grow too apathetic to develop the "seed cast into them by God," when men grow too limp and flaccid to care for anything but religious observances as a means of making their consciences easy, then there may come an outward intellectual reunion of Churches, when all may say the same thing in the same words and manner—only to be broken at the first touch of earnestness. Divine truth is too large and too many-sided for any one age to grasp.

No, to be of one heart and one soul never did, and never can, involve to be of exactly one mind, *i.e.* to see everything intellectually in the same light. Were it so, progress were impossible; were it so, we should be no better off for the strivings and battlings and struggles of men of past ages; they would have given their bodies to be burned for no reason. The union of those who were possessed of one heart and one soul was the union of men who were possessed by a spirit primarily moral—the Christ-spirit of striving after righteousness and self-sacrifice for the sake of others; that, and that alone, would carry them through any intellectual

differences of conception, would enable them to work together in one organisation, would keep them "unspotted from the world."

These thoughts must have a bearing on a question which has lately been exciting some attention—the possibilities of reunion of the Christian Church, especially in the West. A new interest has been given to the whole question by the letter of one[1] whose personal character and long service of his country have left him at the close of his life above the atmosphere of the accidental and temporary differences which may ere now have divided some of us from him. The spectacle of his devotion to that, which those who knew him have always known to be the deepest interest of his life, is one calculated to raise our reverence for human nature; and if I seem to differ from him in the importance that he assigns to the question which called forth his letter, it is with unaffected reverence. But

"Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas."

To me it seems inconceivable that any request for recognition, or any actual recognition, of "Anglican orders" by the Papacy, or *vice versa*,

[1] Mr. Gladstone.

could really bring one inch nearer, or retard for one moment, the true union towards which I believe things are working; when Christians, in spite of numerous differences on secondary questions, shall again be of one heart and one soul, because they are possessed by one spirit—the Christ-spirit. A mere question of agreement on organisation will do little to bring Churches together; the causes of difference lie deeper, and are embedded in English history. It is natural for a statesman to think that unity of organisation is of first-rate importance, and it is quite possible to underrate its value. But does any one who has seriously studied the history of the Papacy for the last thousand years—can any one really think, with both eyes open, and all his mind at work, that it matters one jot or tittle as regards the truth and reality of the question what the Pope says? Have the Popes not always been ruled in such matters by a tacit but well-understood reference to the interests of the Roman curia, which is in their minds synonymous with the interests of righteousness? And is not that exactly the thing that it never can seem to be to any one who without prepossession

studies the mind of Christ as revealed in the Gospels? Is not the whole course of the Papacy sufficiently indicated by its well-known action in the matter of safe conducts in the case of heretics? They gave Huss his safe conduct, and offered it to Luther, but they burnt the one in spite of it, and would have burnt the other but for the secular power. Is there, can there be, ever any hope that a power which has such a history behind it as Papacy has, and has never repented of that history, will look at any question save in the light of its own interests? And looking at them with their history behind them, even if they would bless us and declare us to be God's own ministers, must we not shudder, and must we not cry out, "Your hands are full of blood; wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings."

If there is any value in the protest we made in the sixteenth century, surely it lies in the fact that to some extent it was a protest not against doctrines, but against an essential spirit. Of course I know the treacherousness of the ground. I wish the history of the English Church could

show stronger evidence that it was the spirit of the Papacy and not the intellectual conception of certain doctrines against which she chiefly protested. I wish that the spirit of the Anglican Bishops in the Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian days had been more the spirit of revolt against intolerance and cruelty, and the assertion of gentleness, meekness, and righteousness. But poor and weak as the protest often has been, it has nevertheless been the salvation of Christendom; and that we should go cap in hand to ask unrepentant Rome — Rome, that only ceased to persecute when the sceptical movement partly shamed and partly forced her to leave it off—may be to the taste of a small knot of Churchmen who see in mechanical uniformity the one hope of the Christian world, but it can never seem to be anything but beginning at the wrong end to those who look at the real inwardness of our historical position. Either our protest is justified and must continue till others change, or we have been very, very wrong, and (in that case) the sooner we submit to the Pope the better; only if we do, we shall surely cast away

everything that is best and most Christ-like in our national history. And therefore all these attempts to promote reunion by mere mechanical arrangements are only misleading. Let us set our minds on promoting the righteousness of Christ, on self-sacrifice for others, on sharing our advantages; we shall thus do more to promote reunion than by any attempt at patched-up agreements between the spirit that animates the policy of Rome, and the spirit that must animate those who resent and abhor the historical manifestation of that spirit as utterly un-Christ-like.

It is said most truly that our Divine Master prayed for unity in His great Intercessory Prayer, and we are bidden to use His words in the sense of asking for an outward uniformity. We have not so learned Christ. He prayed "that they may be one, as we are one," that is to say, not in outward manifestation, but in an essential spirit—in longing for righteousness, in the self-giving of each for the other. Depend on it, there is an abundant blessing on that prayer, and ever will be. When Christians again inwardly realise that righteousness is the

law of life, and that to be good matters above everything else, that to follow Christ is the highest conception of life, and that to give one's self for others, to establish true fellowship —to "have all things common"—is the noblest and most satisfying work in life, then we shall be drawn together in such a way that all outward readjustments will follow as a necessity. We find a parallel in our political disagreements; they are fierce and strong, and we believe really that out of such collisions the enduring good comes, though in the meantime we are apparently irreconcilable; we fight even over a national blessing like education. But let a common danger be realised, let the word "national defence" in a time of real peril be uttered, and the imperishable unity underneath asserts itself and our hostilities vanish.

So it will be when the gates of hell are seen to be prevailing, so it will be when the enemy comes in like a flood. Only the enemy must be seen to be not a fellow-Christian who on secondary questions differs from us, but one who hates the spirit of Christ, and would disown His

principles. Then in an inward coming together against a realised common foe we shall find repentance for the past, reconciliation in the present, and triumph in the future.

Meantime there are always opportunities for promoting and increasing this common spirit that makes for union. We are all one to-day [1]—Churchmen, Roman Catholics, Jews, Nonconformists, Agnostics. We all catch the Christ-spirit, we follow His footsteps "Who went about doing good," Who surely is still present in every skilful doctor, in every gentle nurse, in our hospitals. From every fever-stricken patient, from every crushed limb, there comes a cry in our ears, "You who can help, you who know the blessedness of health, save us, as you can."

Let us show ourselves to-day His true disciples; let us do what we can to promote oneness by fighting the common foe, sickness and suffering; let us draw nearer to Him and to one another in the spirit of those early followers, who counted nothing they had as their own, "but had all things common."

[1] Hospital Sunday.

V

THE SELF-ADAPTATION OF THE SOUL

"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked."—2 COR. v. 1–3.

THERE are times in life when things become very real to us—times when death or change or sickness come very near to us; at such times things that ordinarily pass by unobserved assume a new character; we are, as it were, pulled up and made to face them. And always at such times one recurrent question seems to haunt us—about the hereafter, the life of the world to come. Year after year a long procession passes hence of those whom we have known and loved. Where are they? Shall we meet them again? We hope, perhaps, we expect—do we really believe? Is that life real to us—

real as to-morrow's engagements or next week's gatherings? Is it not true more and more that we find people whose lives are good, and who wish to believe, unable to find any comfort or help or inspiration in the thought of the life to come? Is it not the case with some we know, if not with ourselves? The difficulty is not so much one of the reason as of the imagination. It has always been suspected that something would survive death.

> "Non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
> Vitabit Libitinam,"

writes Horace, but practically this belief is so often inoperative because of its want of concreteness.

There are so many questions that naturally arise which cannot be answered, or at any rate answered in a way that satisfies us; guesses seem foolish and unworthy, while any efforts at establishing communication with the world beyond the grave lend themselves so easily to a mixture of fraud and absurdity. Of course there is a portion of society idle, and incurring in its mental vacuity the perpetual penalty of

idleness, which will stir itself into excitement over any new thing, be it some fantastic outgrowth of spiritualism, or a brand-new American improvement on the Christian religion as it has been understood for centuries. Its belief in Theosophy, however, will hardly survive the recital of missives owned to be forged, nor is its cult of Mahatmas likely to be seriously quickened by the information that those mysterious and irregular beings leave behind them "a smell of sandal-wood," as we have lately been assured on the highest authority. *Solvuntur risu tabulæ.* Even the dabbler in strange religions does not care to be ridiculous. It will probably be thought necessary to invent some new form of spiritual excitement to replace the craze for theosophic Buddhism, and to arouse the jaded appetite of those who find no more profitable scope for their energies than to babble about the last new thing in religion. The worst effect of these frauds (even when exposed), and of this unreal cult of sensationalism, is that they tend to increase hopelessness. The hope of a life beyond seems to fade when we con-

template a great waste of power of any kind. Beyond that, it is difficult to conceive of a future for the vacuous as well as for the wilfully deluded, for the larrikins of the streets as well as for the lounger in Hyde Park, for the great middle crowd that goes hence so poorly furnished in character for any higher life. Then again, progress in knowledge apart from Christianity always tends to take away hope of a life to come. It was so in the most brilliant period of the classic world in the time of the Renaissance, it is so in the modern East — in those countries where the greatest strides in learning have been made, in India, in Japan—to-day. Progress in knowledge seems to dissatisfy men with belief in a life of which no scientific account can be given. What has happened before is coming to pass among ourselves. The crude popular notions which prevailed a century ago of a material resuscitation of the buried atoms of the human body have given way; a very little knowledge of the elementary facts of physiology has dissipated them. Progress in knowledge has

made them impossible. Connected with them there grew up a hard, unattractive literalism which seized on the Revelation—that most mysterious of all books—and pressed its gorgeous imagery into actual description. The vulgarising instinct—the same instinct which would convert a great scene of natural beauty like Mont Blanc or Niagara into a tea-garden —has done its deadly work here, and has made the whole subject unpalatable. Or worse still, the same instinct has revelled in the description of a lake of seething pitch in which unbelievers in some particular ism would wallow for ever. You may find traces of this in the epitaphs in almost every country churchyard, and ample evidence of it in sermons of the school of Jonathan Edwards. It is not worth while to disinter them for the sake of raising a repulsion against them; there is no need to do so, for we have passed beyond them, we have come to a more intelligent notion of life and death; we are not likely to be groaning all night over the thought of the tortures of those in hell; even the majestic beauty and spiritualised

horror of Dante's Inferno does not frighten us—it brings no sense of reality with it. Of course the dark mystery which shrouds the final outcome of things beyond judgment is far more really awe-inspiring than if the glare of the footlights were turned upon it. Let us try, then, to find a reasonable basis for thought. The danger here is lest we should be led by our emotions; the imagination requires the support of rational thinking. Let us clear our minds by a few leading questions. Life and death, what are they? Is life here, and death the only after; or is life that is real life, something that cannot perish, over which death has no power? Is death a ceasing to be? Is the broken column its fitting symbol? Or is it the signal of a being under new conditions—a far more real being than now?

I do believe that, in our sane moments, when we are not acting immorally in any way, we feel that there is but one answer to these questions; that the difficulties are entirely connected with the imagination, and that reason has nothing to say to them. I do believe that

the conviction of all men, at the bottom, is the conviction of Mary about her brother, "I know that he shall rise again." But the difficulty is to find a basis for life after the material body is broken up and has passed into dust. We are so accustomed to connect life with the body, to judge of life as manifested by bodily function, to regard life as conditioned by bodily circumstances, that we cannot easily readjust our ideas.

Of course, when we think, and when we feel, and when we choose, we are conscious that these things belong to a different part of us from that which is employed when we eat or drink or smoke; but somehow there is a great difficulty to the imagination in conceiving of feeling and thinking without the exercise of any bodily function at all. For, if it is difficult to localise choice, universal consent refers thinking to the head and feeling to the breast.

The difficulty seizes on the imagination just at this point—we shiver at the thought of disembodied existence, a ghostly phantom life; there is in us the earnest desire to be clothed

upon which St. Paul expresses "if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked," *i.e.* destitute of all that makes life worth having.

Is it possible to give any help here to the bewildered imagination which gazes with such shrinking into the world full of ghostly existences, which sees shades and phantoms and ghosts flitting about, and has nothing but a shrinking dread of being numbered with them? Is it possible to discover a basis of life which shall not be based on the speculations of fancy? St. Paul tells us that it is; he speaks of a vehicle for spirit independent of any cosmical change, "a spiritual body," "a house of God not made with hands."

It helps us to think of it thus: the human soul needs self-expression in whatever state it be, and self-expression it will find in that other world by its capacity of gathering a body round itself—a capacity independent of any mere outward conditions of existence. In the created world there is that which can be shaken and will perish.

The system in which we live, no less than our material body, has the sentence of death within itself; everything, as soon as it loses its adjustment with its environment, a fish, a bird, a man, alike perishes. But there is something which does not perish; the inward power of self-adaptation to surroundings, that power found in an ever-ascending scale till it reaches its culmination in man, and in that power of adaptation to environment lies St. Paul's hope of a life to come that will be real and satisfying — no ghostly existence, but one which can challenge investigation. "Handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have."

There is the eternal within us, beneath the cosmical, the perishing; this eternal within us has the power of self-adaptation through self-expression to the surroundings of that other world. Natural science itself has given us instruction in this matter; it has traced its increase in higher animal life till it reached the apex of creation—man; and man's glory is the God within him; and in that Divine imman-

ence lies the eternal power of gathering to Himself a body in any possible condition of existence.

The practical question follows, Does every one possess this power of self-adaptation? Will there be souls which from lack of it dwindle and perish? Is it something that belongs to man as man, or is it possible so to dwarf the spiritual here that no possibility of adaptation is left to a life beyond. Is annihilation possible?

We can only say two things about this.

1. There is no hint of such an ending in the New Testament. The Resurrection of Christ revolutionised death, abolished death; after that death is treated as the starting-point that ensures a new kind of existence, a life to which there is something added that is not in it now. Death, therefore, is not the end to any man, but only the most mysterious experience of life, the experience that brings out of life its fundamental quality, the power of self-adaptation. Christ brought to light the power of adaptation to the life beyond, which involves a vehicle for the spiritual outside the natural. The idea of con-

ditional immortality has too much the appearance of an easy way out of the difficulty.

2. There are the ominous words of St. Paul about being found naked.

The quantity and quality of life are dependent on our present attitude and our present correspondence with eternal things. The dread is that we should be found naked, that the power of adaptation to a higher life should be unrecognised now, and so allowed to dwindle and decay; the interest allowed to be absorbed in mere gain or pleasure; the heart that should have entwined itself round others and given its best powers to help them should be stunted by selfishness; the will, that should have been made firm and strong to sustain others, should become feeble, fickle, and paralysed; the mind, the wondrous power of knowing, which gives even now exquisite delight, should find its perceptions blinded, its capacity gone.

What would it be to awake and find ourselves destitute of the power of adaptation to our new surroundings; unfit for association with goodness, incapable of it? This is the

real danger, and we shall feel it if we will think. Let us rouse ourselves to the service of man, to the cultivation of the highest powers of all, to seeking the Unseen. Let us pray to God in those matchless words which ring in our ears like some sweet song: "O Almighty God, Who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; grant unto Thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

VI

THE GROWTH OF THE SOUL IN THE WORLD BEYOND

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth . . . that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."—REVELATION xiv. 13.

WE have been thinking of the dead—first of the essential feature of their present life, power of self-adaptation to present surroundings, moral power gained here, by which every soul has the power of projecting, as it were, a body—a form of self-expression suitable to its environment. We have gained a glimpse of the truth that the human soul is in possession of more than one body in possibility, and is capable of gathering to itself a body in any possible condition of existence. And then we passed on to the question of our relation to those who have gone before, and examined two popular theories, which seem to obscure in different fashions the truth of that relation. Let us go on to consider this positively. There has always been

in the Church at large, and in the Church of England especially, a deeper perception of the present relation to the departed than has ever been formulated in any creed or form of words; a sense that without giving way to any exaggeration on the subject of purgatorial fires, and by no means working ourselves into tortures of anxiety on their account, there is much that we can do for them, and much that they do for us; that the interplay of affection and the exchange of kindly offices is possible; that the *requiescant in pace* means something more than a beautiful and fitting aspiration; that we with them and they with us advance; that growth is a common factor in both worlds, and that growth involves in some fashion solidarity—we believe in Communion, *i.e.* in the sharing together of the Saints.

The reasonable ground for this belief lies in the fact of an intermediate state, which is at once a state of rest and a state of growth, a state where men grow, to use St. Paul's language, "right up to the day of the Presence of Christ"—a state that implies improvement after death; not one in which there is attained

at once a forced and mechanical perfection, nor one in which men are tortured into goodness; but one in which some closer discipline of love, some more felt persuasion of the Father's goodness, some clearer appreciation of the mischiefs that follow indulged evil, some truer self-knowledge than is possible here, gradually train each for the life of the world to come, "the life that is life indeed." We have lately seen a glimpse of the mystery in the natural world. The power of the sun in late spring, bringing forth life from the apparently dead world, is a dim figure of what the love of God will do, when men shall really feel it.

And so we think most rightly of Paradise as the garden of God, where the great sun of His Love brings into life what seems to be withered and dead. We can think of beings born in sin, nursed in sin, awakening there to their first chance of a response to God's love—there where Christ has shed the light of His presence—there where His voice has been heard, where His Presence is still felt and realised, where He is gently leading men, as they can bear it,

where He owns every service, and directs every aspiration.

In the early Church His work in Paradise was the subject of much interest; they felt their nearness to the dead as we do not; and if this sometimes led them into a wealth of detailed descriptions which our present knowledge does not justify, there were no horrors and no fears connected with it. The vision of purgatorial fires was the outcome of the morbid fears of a later age. In the earliest ages they delighted to dwell on the world on the other side the grave as a place of growth, of gentle discipline, and of preparation; their heart dwelt, to use St. Cyril's language, every year more and more "on the store in Paradise," and the aspiration that the dead might rest in peace was joined with the sense that it was well with them, and that they were not far from us.

As to this intermediate state the Bible assures us of the fact, but tells us little of the details. Obviously we could not understand them if it did; they are an experience which will dawn gently and slowly upon us. To tell a man

here the secrets of that other world of rest and hope and expectation—what the revealed power of moral forces will be—would be like talking Russian to an English child of four years old. But certain broad features about it stand out clear and unquestioned, which it may be a comfort to some and an interest to all to dwell upon this morning.

1. The intermediate state is the scene of a portion of the redemptive work of Christ. "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient." He descended into Hades, into the common abode of departed spirits; He has made Sheol of the Old Testament into Paradise, the garden of God, by His entrance there. In the Old Testament Sheol is a place of gloom, of conscious and oppressive feebleness. "In death no man remembereth Thee, and who will give Thee thanks in the pit?" "Dost Thou show wonders among the dead, or shall the dead rise up again, and praise Thee?" Every reference is touched with gloom and sadness; a wail goes up from Psalmist and Prophet alike—"Shall Thy wondrous works

be known in the dark, and Thy righteousness in the land where all things are forgotten?"

But where Christ has once stood, has once spoken, the light has shone, and it can never be a place of darkness, of despair and feebleness. Something more is certainly meant by the descent into Hades than that Christ went there till He came back to rise again. Some perpetual Presence is there, realised in a more open fashion; some integral portion of His redemptive work is done there; some new possibility of growth in truth and love are certainly involved in the fact of His entrance into the spirit world. He went there with the glow of His great offering upon Him. He went there to crown hope, to banish despair, to declare good tidings; He is there still with the same message. That some find Him there who have lost their way in the clouds and shadows of earth—that is a matter not only of hope, but of certainty. Men sometimes fear to hint at this lest they should seem to destroy or impair the seriousness of life, and the importance of life as a time of trial. We must

face that risk for what it is worth. To allow the thought that this were not the case would seem to be the deepest disloyalty to Him; for all earnest seeking of truth and goodness is reaching after Him; all true service of man is done for Him; and if it find Him not here, if the "unto Him" be not recognised, surely it will find Him there. In the words of the greatest of our modern teachers,[1] whose best lessons I have so often tried to teach you, "Be the stages what they may, as rough, as strange, as prolonged as they seem to be, true and earnest seeking cannot be in vain; they will lead the honest and good heart to the truth and to the light, to Him Who has the secret and cure of human blindness as of human sin, to Him Who has the key to every burdened soul, Who hears the unuttered desire of every imprisoned spirit." At least, let us who believe in Him dare to say that, in His ministry and His Presence, the world beyond the grave has the source of its light and the means of its perfecting power.

2. And clearly this state of preparation

[1] Dean Church.

embraces all, Dives and Lazarus alike. I would not press the details of a story which is obviously accommodated in some of its language, *e.g.* as regards Abraham's bosom and Gehenna, to the Jewish conceptions of the time; it would be mischievous to represent the details as a real description of the intermediate state; they are obviously and clearly an accommodation to current conceptions, without which the moral of the story would have been lost. But certain broad features which characterise the story cannot be passed over without notice. Evidently Dives had grown out of his all-absorbing selfishness; he was genuinely anxious about his brethren, and desirous that they should "hear Moses and the prophets." He had grown beyond the mere realisation of a personal discomfort about himself to a real sense of the wants of others. And obviously though the interchange of good offices suggested is pronounced impossible, the very fact of those desires being expressed points to some end of union, to an all-embracing state where each is trained according to his own need and want.

3. And one more thing is clear from the New

Testament, no less than from our experience about the intermediate state, viz., that character cannot be forced in its development, that the evolution of character must go on by increased willingness. So St. Paul is confident that "He who hath begun a good work will perform it right up to the Day of Christ"; and St. John bears witness to the same truth. "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" We catch in the words the growing desire for Him Whom at last they clearly see.

It is by dwelling on these things that the intermediate state becomes more real to us. The gradual development of character goes on there by clearer visions of consequences, as also by those moral necessities within which sometimes assert themselves *here*, but *will then insist* on being listened to; there is nothing that makes life so real, nothing that gives us so much encouragement to do and to bear, as the prospects

open to us of continuous growth in the world beyond. As long as we think of change as effected in us mechanically or by purgatorial fire, we remain fatalists or gamblers; that element in our nature that says "I'll chance it," wakes up to bid us grow careless of little things; but directly we think of a process of development in which we shall have to unlearn slowly habits which we so easily form here; directly we think of the possibilities of stunted growth because we will not take trouble, of "wood, hay, and stubble, instead of gold and precious stones," as the result of our life work, we gain a clear, strong motive for taking the utmost pains. We shall carry into that other world what we are, and what we have made ourselves; we shall then slowly unlearn our present obstinacies. If we dwell on that, we shall really see in full significance our present treacheries of heart and will; we shall so struggle that we may not weep with the deep sorrow, which is born of the sight of a wounded Love, over that in which we now so easily allow ourselves.

Surely our look at the world beyond ought to do two things for us.

(1) It ought to make us feel that the Communion of Saints in which we express our belief means something. As we are here the better for other lives that are lived near us, as there are lives here that bless and lives here that wither, so it is there: in some way they who are gone still live by our blessing, and in some way we live by theirs; and the interchange of offices is possible. We cannot doubt that the mother who dies with her child's name on her lips utters that name in perpetual prayer in the closer intercourse of the world beyond. We cannot, if we are human, drop the names of those whom we have loved out of our prayers, that we with them and they with us may come to the everlasting Kingdom. We pray that "we and all Thy whole Church—the Church, *i.e.* in Paradise as well as on earth—may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His Passion." Let us realise where the prayer reaches to. That gradual purification, that growth in light, is a subject for prayer none will deny; but unless there is a communion of prayer felt by ourselves as really offered by them and offered on earth

by us—unless there is this communion of prayer, this interchange of offices, this remembrance in Communion, this sharing together of Christ's Body and Blood—the phrase Communion of Saints becomes stripped of half its meaning. Let us make it a reality, and rest in it as our deepest comfort; let us make the Churchyard, not a scene of tombs or a place of monuments and memorials, but a theatre of living presences whose vividness becomes more intense to us as we strive to correspond to that law of growth which is now the rule, the once desired and at last accepted ideal of their lives.

(2) And lastly, let the thought of the resting world of growth and light be our inspiration when self-improvement is hard and life is a struggle. There are times when we are all tempted to give up, to go and feed with the herd, to let go our ideals, to give up duty and goodness and the Will of God. At such times it must help us to think that our moral and spiritual progress, our resolution, is a subject of the keenest interest not only to those of another race, to God and the angels, but to those with

whom we lived in our child-home, to those who have gone before us, and who now watch our struggles and hail our victories and mourn our backslidings with a truer perception of the issues than was possible here. "All things are made manifest by the light, for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." And the light shines clear beyond the dark river of death.

Let us, above all, remember whence we came and whither we go. Out of God's bosom, the fount of life, we came, from God Who is our Home; through storm and fret, and change and woe and joy we pass; but the end is the same before us all. We go with our mistakes and failures, our shortcomings and sins, and with all our honest efforts and renewed struggles we go back again to meet God; we return whence we came, to the bosom of His love, and there at last we shall find the solution so far beyond all we have looked for and cared for; we shall find all we have "loved and lost awhile" transfigured, ennobled, growing into perfection.

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